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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 011489

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2016
TAGS: PREL PGOV PHUM GG RS
SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA: BACKLASH AGAINST THE BACKLASH?

REF: MOSCOW 11414

Classified By: Charge Daniel A. Russell. Reasons: 1.4(B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Public Chamber has condemned bureaucratic moves that have targeted ethnic Georgians, but few elected officials have followed suit. Deportations have temporarily slowed, but arrests of Georgians who are accused of not having legal status in Russia continue. There is anecdotal evidence that day-to-day harassment of ethnic Georgians has not let up. We are seeking a more comprehensive picture of the scope of deportations from migration and human rights contacts. End Summary.
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Public Chamber Takes a Step Forward

¶2. (C) While defending official sanctions against Georgia, Public Chamber Secretary and Academician Yevgeniy Velikhov condemned "irresponsible steps of toadying officials" that have hurt ethnic Georgians. He added that relations between Tbilisi and Moscow should not depend "on the anti-Russian policy of the Tbilisi regime or the anti-Georgian campaign of short-sighted bureaucrats." Duma Culture Committee Chairman Iosef Kobzon, often dubbed the "Russian Frank Sinatra" as much for his mob connections as for his voice, also called for an "emotional, honest and fundamental" dialogue between Russians and Georgians. The Union of Right Forces has condemned moves against Georgians as a hysterical reaction that is fueled by those around Putin who want him to remain in power beyond 2008 and who are trying to create enemies that would justify their position. Yabloko has called for the equal application of the law to all nationalities in Russia. Few politicians (particularly those in parties poised to enter the 2007 Duma), however, are prepared to denounce the discriminatory campaign given the gut-appeal among the electorate for an anti-foreigner message. While the press has reported possible Duma consideration of legislation that would ban top Georgian officials from entering or transiting Russia, a procedural hiccup might delay passage of the legislation for a short time.
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Pace of Deportations Slows Temporarily

¶3. (C) Vyacheslav Postavnin, Deputy Head of the Federal Migration Service, publicly claimed on October 12 that there were no special anti-Georgian immigration raids. However, a human rights lawyer in St. Petersburg supplied us with copies of orders from a Major General in the Saint Petersburg Interior Ministry Office which demand that militia officers work in coordination with the Federal Migration Service to arrest and deport Georgian citizens who are not legally entitled to be in Russia. In a separate order, a militia colonel in Saint Petersburg demands daily reports on the number of Georgian citizens arrested for crimes or misdemeanors, including violations of the passport regime, and asks that details be provided of any weapons, ammunition

or drugs found with the arrested Georgians.

¶4. (C) George Karalashvili, the Political Counselor at the Georgian Embassy, told us October 12 that fewer than 10 Georgians were deported on Wednesday but that he expected more than 100 would be deported on Saturday depending on the availability of transportation. He said that arrests continued and that the Georgian Embassy was receiving a steady stream of calls complaining about ill treatment on its 24 hour hot line The press has reported that almost 600 undocumented Georgians have been ordered to be deported during the last week, but the Georgian Embassy was unable to confirm that figure. (Comment: We hope to have better numbers from human rights groups and the Georgian Embassy on Friday.)

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Driving While Georgian

¶5. (C) We continue to hear anecdotal evidence that traffic stops and harassment of Georgians has increased. As Karalashvili told us, once the traffic police determine from the license that the driver's name has the suffix of "ze" or "ili" (common to many Georgians), then the level of harassment and the required bribe has gone up, even when the driver can prove Russian citizenship. We have heard of at least two instances where drivers with "Georgian" names were required to go to the police station to be photographed and fingerprinted following a routine traffic stop.

¶6. (C) An ethnic Georgian lawyer who immigrated from Abkhazia to Moscow in the early nineties explained to us the impact of the crackdown on the resident Georgian community. She said that she knew of Georgian parents of school-age

children who were keeping their children at home because of fears of harassment and said that many parents of older children were fearful their children would not be accepted into university this fall because of their ethnicity. Her own son, who was a Russian policeman, was afraid he would lose his job. The lawyer -- who claimed that she was not a supporter of Saakashvili -- said she had few places to turn. She had immigrated to Russia as a young person and could not return to Abkhazia because of the frozen conflict. She would not be able to return to Tbilisi and professionally establish herself because she spoke Russian well but not Georgian. She said several Georgians she knew that were in a similar position were looking to Ukraine as a possible place of refuge.

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